

Introduction

Contradictions of sexual representation

by Chuck Kleinhans

from *Jump Cut*, no. 41, May 1997, p. 20

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Simple binary ways of thinking about sexuality and representation frame issues of sex, gender, and difference in ways that appear increasingly confusing and unproductive. Continuing a discussion of sexual representation from our last issue (Special Section: Studying Sexual Images, JC 40, pp. 102-136), we present several articles which move the discourse in the direction of grasping contradictions which change in history.

Peter Lehman's analysis of the controversy surrounding THE PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT underlines the way the public discussion is framed within the simple opposition First Amendment/pornography, where both sides understand the term pornography as intrinsically evil. Neither side of the debate, when phrased this way, allows one to ask or explore what pornography is, what its means of expression are, and how it appeals to sexual desire and curiosity. And, most important, how it is like mainstream cultural practices. To admit that set of questions is to open deeper issues of how art and the media represent sex, race, and class, and how audiences are emotionally invested and corporate structures are financially invested in such representation.

On college campuses and in other forums, an educational show presenting the dangers of pornography (and more recently the pleasures of pornography) has become a recognizable mode for conveying anti-pornography positions. Yet, as Eithne Johnson describes these presentations, both directly debating the issue pro and con or simply implying the existence (and danger) of the opposite view continue a binary logic. The anti-porn argument assumes polar opposites which lead to simple acceptance/rejection behavior rather than more complex understanding of the issues involved in industrially produced sexual images. In contrast, sex positive speaker Suzie Bright promotes a diversity of porn and readings of it. Anti-porn arguments fall back on assuming an evil porn and an acceptable erotic, but can never actually bring forward a comparison of examples. To look at the "difference" would reveal actual differences in how people read sexual images and indicate how heavily the "acceptable" is locked within class- and education-bound notions of good taste and aesthetic discrimination.

Such questions of taste and proper framing of sex images are at the core of producing self-improvement sex-education videos. Robert Eberwein explores the self-help genre and its marketing. A quintessential U.S. phenomenon, the tapes repeat the "education as alibi" pattern of hardcore's emergence above ground in the 1970s. The tapes go to great lengths to provide a safe justification for voyeurism by linking it to U.S. values of education and self-improvement.

In her new book, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*, Laura Kipnis explores the transgressive boundaries of porn today: cops' policing the Internet, transvestite porn, the body in "fat porn," and *Hustler* as a class-offensive attack on middle class norms. In his review of this book, Eric Schaefer finds the analysis redefines the porn discussion precisely by insisting on how similar porn is to other cultural expressions. Kipnis concludes that pornography opens a space which allows for fantasy unrestricted by the social and political limits of the normative order.

In JUMP CUT 40 Laura Marks considers independent films and tapes which complexly move across boundaries, exploiting differentials in new ways ("Straight Women, Gay Porn, and the Scene of Erotic Looking"). A similar concern for works by innovative artists and how they have pushed beyond binary logic is at the heart of Chris Straayer's groundbreaking new book *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies*. Reviewing the Straayer book, Jane Gaines finds it bends genre categories back on themselves by taking up avant garde works which break formal conventions and content taboos to explore contradictions of sex and gender. Rather than remaining frozen in polar opposites, Straayer's analysis promotes seeing the world as deeply contradictory, employing a both/and understanding of difference in material and ideological terms over time, subject to historical change.

Such an understanding begins to move us beyond the limits of the people *versus* Larry Flynt to consider how Flynt is another backwoods boy made good, a self-made millionaire who figured out a successful marketing strategy to an U.S. audience. Beyond the hero/demon binary, Flynt appears as an exemplary cultural producer, embodying the success myth so dear to conservatives, and his historical figure is in need of a more sophisticated analysis. Sexual representation is changing. Developing an analysis of how and why those changes are taking place means moving beyond binary distinctions.